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SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

I. Soviet Naval Forces in the Indian Ocean

A. History of the Soviet Force

1. The Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean began in March 1968, when four ships from Vladivostok made goodwill visits to six Indian Ocean countries--Sri Lanka, India, Kenya, Somalia, Pakistan and South Yemen. Such goodwill cruises were the principal activity through late 1969. Since then, the Indian Ocean force has spent most of its time in the northwestern portion of the ocean, where the Soviets have acquired use of several port facilities.
2. Although the number of countries visited annually has decreased since 1969, the general expansion of the naval force and the increased use of a few ports on a routine basis have resulted in an overall increase in the number of port calls.

Large Map

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3. The growth in Soviet naval deployments to the Indian Ocean since 1968 has been gradual, but relatively steady. Soviet naval ship-days in the Indian Ocean increased from about 1,000 in 1968 to 5,000 in 1970 and 9,000 in 1974, and the normal force grew from two surface warships to six surface warships and a submarine during this period.
 - a. During the India-Pakistan War in 1971 and the Middle East crisis in 1973 and early 1974, the Soviets augmented their Indian Ocean force by several warships.
 - b. About one-third of the total activity in the past three years has been associated with harbor clearing operations in Bangladesh and mine-sweeping in the Gulf of Suez.

B. Composition of the Soviet Force

1. The composition of the Soviet Indian Ocean force varies considerably as units move in and out of the area. The basic contingent of Soviet naval units conducting routine operations in the Indian Ocean usually is composed of one destroyer, two destroyer escorts, two minesweepers, and an amphibious ship--as well as a diesel submarine and seven auxiliary support ships, including a merchant tanker.
2. Along with this basic force, the Soviets have a continuing practice of sending a cruiser once

or twice a year to make several flag-showing port calls in the area for short periods.

3. During 1972-1974, the Soviet navy conducted mine-clearing and salvage operations in the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh. By late 1972 this activity involved about 15 ships and boats, but during the second year of operations, this number was gradually reduced. Some of these ships joined others in the Red Sea in July 1974 to carry out mine-clearing operations in the Strait of Gubal.

- a. Mine-sweeping operations in the Strait of Gubal lasted from late July through November 1974.
- b. The helicopter ship Leningrad and an escorting destroyer entered the Indian Ocean last summer and joined the mine-clearing group at the end of July.

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c. This is the first time a helicopter ship had operated in the Indian Ocean or the Red Sea.

4. The Soviet warships and submarines sent to the Indian Ocean normally come from the Pacific Fleet, which also provides their logistic support. Units from the western fleets, however, have normally operated in the Indian Ocean for a few months in the course of transferring to the Pacific. The Indian Ocean has become, in effect, a "southern sea route" for the interfleet transfer of naval units. About one fourth of the Soviet warships and submarines that have operated there have been transferring to the Pacific from the western fleets.

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a... Two Kresta-II class cruisers and two nuclear-powered submarines--one C class cruise missile unit and one V class torpedo attack unit--operated in the Indian Ocean in 1974 while transferring from the Baltic and Northern fleets to the Pacific Fleet. These ships and submarines were the first of their classes to operate in the Indian Ocean. They constituted a more impressive Soviet naval presence than previously seen in this area. The Soviet Pacific Fleet, as a result of the modernization, will have

available more modern ships, some of which could conduct routine operations in the Indian Ocean.

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C. Activities of the Soviet Force

Until October 1973 the Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean spent 80 percent of their time at anchor or in port. Now, although more active, they still maintain a lower tempo of naval activity than Soviet ships in the Atlantic and Mediterranean operating areas. Recent tours of Soviet warships forming the basic contingent have been as long as 12 months--twice that of earlier tours--suggesting that some logistics problems have been overcome.

1. In 1973 for the first time the Soviet Indian Ocean contingent conducted surveillance of the annual CENTO naval exercise. The exercise occurred soon after the Middle East October War at a time when the Soviet contingent had been augmented.

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2. In December 1974 Soviet ships monitored the 1974 CENTO exercise. During 1974 several US naval

task forces cruised in the Indian Ocean for brief periods. Soviet units monitored these groups while they were in the western Indian Ocean.

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4. In mid-1974 the Soviets established a patrol of the entrance to the Persian Gulf--the Strait of Hormuz. The patrol, while not continuous, has been maintained for as long as three months at a time and on two occasions when US carriers were close by.

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5. In 1974 and early 1975 flag-showing diplomatic visits to Sri Lanka, Mali, Ethiopia, India, and Mauritius were made by Soviet warships.

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Soviet naval units as well as US and French units, provided hurricane relief to Mauritius in early 1975.

- a. A port call by a Soviet minesweeper was made to Hoidida, North Yemen, in early 1975--the first in several years.
- b. Mogadiscio, the capital of Somalia, was visited by the command ship of the Indian Ocean contingent during the state visit of Admiral

Gorshkov. Ordinarily this would have occasioned a shipboard reception for the diplomatic community, but there was no such event. Apparently it was a working visit for the Admiral.

II. Logistic Support for the Indian Ocean Squadron

A. Berbera, Somalia

Although the Soviet navy has no US-type homeport in the Indian Ocean, most Soviet naval ships rely on the port of Berbera in Somalia for minor repairs, periodic replenishment, and crew rest and recreation during Indian Ocean deployments. Because of such free access to Berbera, the Soviets have been able to double the length of time their ships can remain on station.

1. Berbera is the only major port serving northern Somalia and is second only to Chisimaio in commercial activity. The harbor is well protected and has a free and clear approach with few of the effects of the southwest monsoon which causes heavy swells and strong currents at other Somali ports.

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[REDACTED] The main quay has

two alongside berths equipped with fresh water, power and hoisting machinery, and is normally reserved for cargo vessels. Soviet naval units normally tie up at the eastern service quay.

3. In February 1969, less than a month after the inauguration of the port's deep-water facilities, a Soviet guided missile destroyer made a port call at Berbera. Between 1969 and 1972, Berbera was visited routinely by Soviet warships on cruises in the Indian Ocean, but the Soviet navy maintained no permanent support assets at the port.
4. Toward the end of 1972 a combination barracks and repair barge was towed to the port and berthed there. A significant increase in Soviet use of Berbera followed with three times as many visits by warships in 1973 as in 1972.
5. In 1973, during the June to September monsoon season, Soviet Indian Ocean naval ships spent long periods in port at Berbera for the first time. During the winter months they continued to use the international waters around Socotra

Island as a center for operations, but still relied heavily on Berbera for routine upkeep and replenishment and for crew rest and rehabilitation.

- a. The Soviets have a small storage area at the pier. Food and water are not plentiful in the area, however, making it likely that these are largely supplied to warships from Soviet naval auxiliaries.



- c. The barracks and repair barge--together with some storage or work area on the pier--constitute the Soviet ship maintenance capability at

Berbera. There is no capability to lift
even the smallest Soviet ships out of the
water at Berbera.

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- f. The existing Berbera airfield consists of two sand strips both under 5,000 feet long. It is suitable only for light transport aircraft.
- g. A new airfield, however, is being built at Berbera within two miles of the Soviet missile storage and handling facility. The runway will apparently be long enough for the largest Soviet aircraft. Soviet use of an airfield at Berbera would improve their ability to support their naval forces in the Indian Ocean and provide rapid resupply from the USSR.

B. Aden, South Yemen

Just over 100 miles to the north, across the Gulf of Aden from Berbera, is the port of Aden in the

People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Admiral Gorshkov, Soviet Deputy Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy, made an official visit to Aden in December 1974 when he visited Somalia.

1. Aden's port is visited frequently by Soviet auxiliary ships for water, food, and occasionally fuel. Soviet naval ships do not usually take on fuel from non-Soviet sources.

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2. The Soviet Navy increased its use of the port in the summer of 1974. Much of the logistic support for the Soviet mine-clearing operations in the Strait of Gubal came from Aden. In addition, Soviet naval ships in 1974 began extensive use of an anchorage area adjacent to the port where they are serviced by Soviet logistic ships. The helicopter ship Leningrad was serviced by logistic ships at this anchorage last September,

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3. Aden's nearby international airfield may provide the Soviet Indian Ocean contingent with a transport connection to the USSR.

C. Iraq

1. Warship visits have been made to the major Iraqi port of Basra--probably to the Iraqi naval base there. Soviet naval support ships have made extended visits of six months or more to this base. Soviet warships, including those which operated in the Strait of Hormuz, have visited the support ships in Basra and probably received support services from them. On other occasions support ships have accompanied Soviet warships to Basra.

2. The port of Umm Qasr in Iraq was developed, in part with Soviet economic assistance. The Iraqi naval facility at this port was also constructed with Soviet help and the Soviets have provided ships and training to the Iraqi navy. Warships of the Soviet Indian Ocean contingent have visited the

port and nearby anchorages for brief periods from as early as 1968.

D. India

The Soviets helped build India's naval base at Vizakhapatnam and have equipped the Indian Navy with minor warships and diesel submarines. Nevertheless, New Delhi has not granted the Soviets special access to Indian ports, nor is it likely to do so in the foreseeable future.

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E. Singapore

Soviet naval auxiliaries regularly call at Singapore as they enter and exit the Indian Ocean. Since May 1972 Soviet naval support ships have been serviced in the commercial drydock facilities there, thus relieving the burden on the crowded facilities of the Soviet Far East.

F. Floating Bases

The Soviet navy still relies heavily on "floating bases"--groups of auxiliary ships--to support their Indian Ocean units. The most frequently used ocean anchorages--in addition to those

close to Aden and Umm Qasr--are near the island of Socotra and in the Chagos Archipelago where the Soviets have implanted mooring buoys.

1. To serve the ships at anchor, Soviet logistic ships take on supplies at such ports as Colombo, Sri Lanka and Port Louis, Mauritius to supplement those brought from the Soviet ports.

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2. It also would facilitate the logistic support of ships in the Indian Ocean and reduce Soviet dependence on littoral countries.
 3. A reopened canal would expedite interfleet transfers and deliveries of military aid.
 4. A few warships from the Mediterranean squadron probably would be sent to the Indian Ocean once the canal opens.
 - a. Because of the higher priority of Soviet naval operations in the Mediterranean and the need to maintain a strategic reserve in the Black Sea, the Soviet Pacific Fleet would still be the chief source of supply for surface combatants and the only source for submarines for the Indian Ocean. Support ships could be drawn from the Black Sea and the Pacific on a nearly equal basis.
 5. The USSR probably recognizes that the canal is subject to closure in a crisis. The Soviets would not wish to be caught with a substantial portion of available units on the wrong end of a blocked canal, and in considering this contingency they almost certainly would give priority to their Mediterranean squadron.
- B. The Soviet naval presence is believed to be one element of a total program for establishing Soviet political

influence in the Indian Ocean area. Other elements include economic assistance, military trade and aid, as well as classical diplomatic and commercial relations. In these areas, however, the Soviets have many competitors. In naval power they probably consider the US and France as significant competitors, and Iran as the major indigenous force. Because the Soviet navy in the Indian Ocean has a different kind of mission with a lower priority than that for other areas, the military capabilities of this force will probably never match those for forces in the Atlantic, Pacific, or Mediterranean waters. As the total resources of the Soviet navy grow, however, those devoted to the Indian Ocean can be expected to increase.

1. We believe the Soviet buildup will be gradual, resulting in a continuously deployed force of 10-12 combatants by 1977.
2. We believe this buildup will consist of increasingly more modern ships and submarines.

3. We also expect the Soviets to increase their

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naval air operations in this area,

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<u>Class</u>	<u>India</u>	<u>Iran</u>	<u>France</u>
Aircraft Carriers	1	-	-
Light Cruisers	2	-	-
Submarines	8	-	-
Guided Missile Frigates	-	-	1
Guided Missile Destroyers	-	3	1
Guided Missile Destroyer Escorts	-	4	-
Guided Missile Patrol Boats	8	-	1
Destroyer Escorts	19	-	3
Coastal Patrol Ships/Craft	9	14	3
Mine Warfare Ships	8	4	5
Amphibious Warfare Ships	4	16	1
Auxiliary/Logistics Ships	17	12	3
Large Gun Boats	-	7	4
Air Cushioned Vehicles	-	12	-
Submarine Chaser	2	-	-
TOTALS	<u>78</u>	<u>72</u>	<u>22</u>

Indian Navy

Of the countries bordering the Indian Ocean, India has the largest maritime force. It probably could defeat any of the regional navies in the north, although its combat effectiveness is limited by obsolescent equipment, poor maintenance, and an inadequate logistics system. Most of the major combatants are based at Bombay. A few of them are at Vishakhapatnam, and some of the minor contingents are located at Cochin in the south, and at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands.

Iranian Navy

Iran's major combatants--three destroyers, four destroyer escorts, and some coastal patrol boats--are based at Bandar Abbas, at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. These ships limit their patrols to the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Gulf of Oman.

French Navy

The French navy is one of the chief means by which Paris shows support for its interests in the

Indian Ocean. A maritime zone has been established under a unified command that covers the Indian and Antarctic Oceans. Following the loss in 1973 of their base and communications facility at Diego Suarez on Madagascar, the French have relied on floating command and support facilities.

The Indian Ocean command maintains a permanent flotilla consisting of three destroyer escorts, one command ship, two motor gun boats, one utility landing craft, and a repair ship. The French also maintain a small naval contingent at Djibouti in the Territory of the Afars and the Issas along the Gulf of Aden. This force consists of two motor gun boats, one guided missile patrol boat, three patrol craft, and about five minesweepers.

In reaction to what it perceives as growing Soviet and US influence in the area, Paris began taking measures early last year to increase its naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Since that time, the French have been rotating small groups of warships every six months. The group there now consists of a guided missile frigate, a guided missile destroyer, and an oiler.